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Article

Marx, financial capitalism and the fractured society: Using Bhaskar's dialectical critical realism to frame a transformatory sociological programme of action for resistance and change

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Abstract

This article begins by considering the relevance and limitations of Marx's writings for understanding post-1970s financial capitalism. Two specific propositions are outlined and developed. The first is that twenty-first-century financial capitalism is conspicuously vulnerable to implosion or collapse, notably via a Habermasian 'legitimation crisis'. The second traces its progressive 'fracturing', with references to neoliberal austerity and post-welfarism and their deepening impact on the disadvantaged and vulnerable and the sick and disabled. The article then turns to Bhaskar's dialectical critical realism, suggesting, and attempting to show, that it lends additional philosophical and theoretical weight ('deepens' in Bhaskar's terms) the reach and range of Marxian analyses. The third part of the article focuses on Bhaskar's evolving theory of transformative – or emancipatory – action. It is contended that his account grounds and allows for rational and compelling resistance to financial capitalism's neoliberal status quo. In the concluding section, the affinity between Bhaskar's (neo-Marxian) theory of transformative action and the present authors' concept of 'action sociology' is outlined. The article concludes with a manifesto for an action sociology oriented to 'absence', challenging 'constraining ills' and imagining and researching 'alternate futures'.

Keywords

Bhaskar, class/command dynamic, contradiction, critical realism, emancipation, foresight and action sociology, human flourishing, Marx, weaponising stigma

Introduction

Marx remains the paramount theoretician of capitalism, for all that the world 150 years after the mature culmination to his enquiries has changed almost beyond recognition. It is always tempting to favour discontinuity over continuity. Notwithstanding the unparalleled acceleration of technological

innovation and of contemporary capital and informational flows, capitalism as a social formation has retained its contradictions and many of its tendencies into what we have come to call post-1970s financial capitalism (Scambler and Scambler, 2013). We commence this contribution with a brief synopsis of our characterisation of financial capitalism and its reliance on Marx, in the process identifying what we take to be its core 'mechanism', namely a distinctive class/command dynamic. Financial capitalism, we go on to suggest, has delivered a society optimally defined as fractured (Scambler, 2018b), framed by social disintegration in various forms.

Capitalism in the 'developed societies' of the nineteenth century, Marx argued, owed its instability to contradiction. Contradiction for Marx is a structural property of a system that necessarily generates dysfunctions for that system. Thus, class struggle and periodic crises are necessarily generated by capitalism but are dysfunctional for capitalist society. These contradictions are 'internal'. Buechler (2008: 58–59) gives examples of enduring internal contradictions in capitalism. He cites that between social production and private appropriation. Production in capitalism requires the coordinated inputs of many people and is thus organised socially. Appropriation, on the other hand, is private and individual. Capitalism is efficient at producing toothbrushes and driverless automobiles (i.e. private commodities), but deficient in producing public goods (like health care and integrated transport systems). Another contradiction is manifest in the polarisation of wealth and poverty. Because capital is concentrated in fewer (and fewer) hands, the rich grow (even) richer: even when the living standards of 'wage-labourers' improve, that of the owners of capital typically improves faster. Globally, the polarisation of rich and poor is extreme. Yet another contradiction is that capitalism produces for profit, not use. In other words, it privileges profit over need; and production for profit instead of use creates additional instability by allowing the exceptional affluence 'of the few' to coexist with the unmet needs 'of the many'.

Contradictions can become economic crises, as with over-production or under-consumption for example. Such crisis tendencies cannot be eliminated, but can be managed. In capitalism's 'liberal' phase in the nineteenth century, the market provided system integration by coordinating the production and distribution of material goods, and social integration by providing cultural norms, values and identities that were more or less consonant with and so reinforced people's economic motivation. Beliefs about equal opportunity, upwards mobility and that hard work was the way to 'get on' typically prevailed. Because system and social integration alike were largely market-dependent, liberal capitalism was particularly prone to crisis.

With the transition to post-WW2 'welfare-state' capitalism, corporations rather than markets came to dominate. Corporations, and especially transnational corporations, can monopolise production, set prices and manipulate demand, in the process cancelling out any putative benefits of 'free market competition', like price reduction. Welfare-state capitalism was characterised too by a conspicuous increase in state intervention, the culmination of liberal capitalism's failure to deliver system and social integration. The state underwrote necessary, 'unprofitable' goods and services; secured infrastructures; subsidised education and training; provided insurance and support for those without work, disabled people and the retired; and mitigated capitalism's environmental by-products. Potentials for crisis grew more complex.

The onset of post-1970s financial capitalism, which has elicited numerous rival nomenclatures, was marked by the US abrogation of Bretton Woods, the freeing of money capital from the regulation of national banks and international recession. The issues of this shift, according to Carroll (2008: 55–56), were (a) the 'maturation' of transnational finance as banks established symbiotic relations with transnational corporations; and (b) the resurgence of money capital across the economies of the 'developed' world. Commentators focused on financialisation. Profits shifted from productive to

money capital. Institutional shareholders and private equity outfits came to displace corporate management as prime beneficiaries.

We have characterised financial capitalism in terms of a radically revised 'class/command dynamic' (Scambler, 2018b; Scambler and Scambler, 2013, 2015), arguing that a strongly globalised or transnational capitalist executive has come to exercise growing sway over a more nation-bound 'power elite' at the apex of the apparatus of the state. We have defined this asymmetric combination of capitalist executive and power elite as constituting a plutocracy or 'governing oligarchy'. The capitalist executive in our construction comprises three specific classes: capital monopolists, capital auxiliaries and capital sleepers, which are defined in Figure 1 (see Scambler, 2018a, 2018b). The capitalist executive is small, consisting of less than the Occupy Movement's '1%', and, though increasingly heterogeneous (Davis, 2018), immensely influential.

Figure 1. Defining the capitalist executive in financial capitalism.

Source: Adapted from Scambler (2018b).

C Wright Mills' (1956) explication of the power elite in 1950s America rested on the intimate interconnections between the corporate chieftains, the military warlords and the political directorate. The relations of class (via the capitalist executive) and relations of command (or the state) that feature in our class/command dynamic and governing oligarchy share some of the properties of Mills' power elite. In Mills' account, members of the power elite share what Bourdieu (1980) was later to term a common habitus, that is, 'a subjective but non-individual system of internalised structures, common schemes of interpretation, conception and action' (p. 60). So it is with members of the governing oligarchy. Some of Mills' related concepts are especially pertinent. The first is that of interlocking memberships: this is not just a matter of shared backgrounds and inter-marriage, which as Davis (2018) suggests may well be weakening, but denotes a complex web or network of interrelations. The second is tacit co-ordination: Mills (1956: 69) describes this as 'a sure sociological substitute for "conspiracy"', his point being that members of his power elite (and our governing oligarchy) rarely need to conspire given their shared habitus. They may well, and in fact do, fight like cats and dogs within their particular domains, but they retain a sharp sense of collective, inter- and intra-domain interests. The third is that of small decisions: his point here is that a plenitude of small decisions often substitute for, yet add up to, a handful of much bigger decisions. Mention should be made, finally, of a higher immorality: this refers to a weakening of 'old values' and an 'organization of irresponsibility' via a 'creeping indifference and a silent hollowing out' ('blessed are the cynical, for only they have what it takes to succeed') (Mills, 1956: 345, 347). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, we might rather talk in terms of 'post-truth' and 'fake news' in this context (see Kakutani, 2018). In these ways, in accordance with such mechanisms, the class-driven, command-shaped governing oligarchy make policy in the interests (primarily, capital accumulation) and in line with the ambitions (primarily, wielding power) of those who comprise it.

Aspects of the 'fractured society'

Financial capitalism and the associated social disintegration has, we argue, resulted in a 'fractured society', that is a society characterised by 'class as an absent presence, McDonaldisation as end-stage control, surplus cultural liquidity, flows and superhubs, and the weaponizing of stigma' (Scambler, 2018b: 6). In order to identify and better understand the mechanisms that have resulted in this fracturing, a theoretical frame is needed. Mechanisms like the class/command dynamic are only detectable via their impacts. In what Bhaskar has defined as an 'open system', that is, one in which laboratory-type experimental 'closures' are not possible, it is via the empirical study of events

that 'really existing' mechanisms reveal themselves. Taking the example of health inequalities, it is apparent that the widening gap between the health status and longevity of members of the working classes and the old and new middle classes is down above all to the unintended consequences of strategic decision-making within the capitalist executive, who go missing from data-sets (Scambler, 2018b; Scambler and Scambler, 2015). Members of the capitalist executive and power elite can be described as pathogenic, as prime social determinants of population health, sickness, disability and longevity.

Our contention, then, is that health inequalities are in large part a function of the self-serving, adaptive, strategic decision-making of those hard-core transnational nomads oriented above all else to capital accumulation, plus those among the power elite they purchase as the prepotent means to that end. We have maintained that with ever more unseemly haste in financial capitalism policies exacerbating health inequalities have been formulated, implemented and heavily policed. Among their number are measures to weaken trade unions and labour representation and rights; wage freezes, the promotion of part-time, transitory and insecure work via the likes of zero hours contracts (inducing what has come to be called 'precarity'); and the termination of final salary pension schemes. These work alongside moves to facilitate and allow for extensive outsourcing; engineer the privatisation of public services, including the National Health Service (NHS); decimate social care; cut funding to local authorities and support services; and cut benefits in the guise of rationalising welfare support, as with the rolling out of universal benefit. Measures like these have deepened health inequalities by severely reducing, even cutting off, a number of asset flows known to be salient for health and well-being, such as social support networks and access to material and other resources (Scambler, 2018b).

It is our contention that the Marxian contradictions outlined by commentators like Buechler have grown so acute under financial capitalism as to precipitate a 'fracturing' of society. Small fissures discernible during postwar welfare-statism have become wider and deeper, some arguably even beyond the healing power of capitalism. Deploying Sayer's (2015) phrasing, we can indeed 'no longer afford the rich'. Three propositions invite consideration at this point:

The uninhibited class-driven (exploitative) and state-sponsored (oppressive) attack on professional, middle-class and service as well as lower-paid workers and the unemployed (as articulated in the measures cited above) have not only rendered capitalism's contradictions more pressing and occasioned widespread fracturing but carry a threat to capitalism's very continuation (Streeck, 2016).

Relatedly, the chances of a legitimisation crisis are enhanced (notwithstanding the class/command dyad's comfortable riding of the global financial crisis of 2008/9).

What might nowadays be described as a 'route map' for transformatory change has a new urgency. It is the requirement for a narrative and a route map to a post-capitalist formation that primarily occupies us here. While there have been voluminous enquiries, plus many constructive as well as destructive critiques of Marx's writings, a case might be made that 150 years later a 'sympathetic' rethink might be in order. Bhaskar (2016) has made the bold claim that his critical realism opens doors. Critical expositions of Bhaskar's 'basic' realism (BCR) and 'dialectical' critical realism (DCR) are covered elsewhere (Scambler, 2018b; Scambler and Scambler, 2015), but a brief encapsulation is contained in Figure 2.

Source: Adapted from Scambler and Scambler (2015) and Scambler (2018b).

Bhaskar's neo-Marxist account of agential transformation provides the potential for a way forward. Bhaskar's notion of an open society as a frame allows for the exploration of mechanisms and the

forces that have shaped them and will shape them going forward, without presuming a constant conjunction (event b always following event a). Furthermore, it offers a strengthened ontological position by allowing a focus on multiple strata of events and mechanisms, and extends and integrates the causal power of agency in understanding the mechanisms of inequality. In addition, the concepts of (a) 'human flourishing', (b) 'eudaimonia', or universal emancipation, and (c) 'concrete utopia' can be used to further expand our understanding of the impact and experiences of inequality. Bhaskar, we contend, fortifies Marx's analysis by providing a telling contemporary philosophical/theoretical rationale, or narrative, for a transformation beyond capitalism as a social formation. The present contains pasts as well as futures, and Bhaskar's transformation model of social action provides a way of imagining possible alternative futures.

Envisioning possible futures

Sociology, contends, neither needs nor should be beholden to Hume's seminal 'is-ought' dichotomy (which asserts that no inference to what ought to be the case can be made from knowledge of what is the case). There is a twofold argument here. First, it is clear that people have long been motivated by ideas and beliefs that might or might not be in their interests. As Creaven (2007) notes,

powerholders and superordinate groups have both vested interests and the institutional and cultural capacities to disseminate their own self-justificatory beliefs across the rest of society, to misinterpret unequalitarian social relations as in the interests of everyone, or to justify publicly their own oppressive or exploitative institutions in the eyes of the downtrodden or subordinate.

(p. 16)

If it is indeed the case that people's interpretations of the worlds they inhabit are themselves part of 'social reality', and that these interpretations can be partial, misleading or downright wrong, then it is surely the responsibility of the sociologist to reveal this, and to explain why. This may involve 'exposing' the ideological character and deployment of cultural resources by dominant vested interest groups to retain and extend their power and privilege by disseminating 'false consciousness'. Bhaskar (1987) writes,

if ... one is in possession of a theory which explains why false consciousness is necessary, then one can pass immediately, without the addition of any extraneous value judgements, to a negative evaluation of the object (generative structure, system of social relations or whatever) that makes consciousness necessary (and, ceteris paribus, to a positive evaluation of action rationally directed at the removal of the causes of false consciousness).

(p. 63)

Not only then can this framework help us identify the structures or social systems that spread 'false consciousness', but it incorporates the expectation that such false consciousness, and the structures/systems that create it, should be challenged.

Second, and moving on from exposing false consciousness, certain sociological conclusions/propositions, if true, carry with them moral obligations, as it were, 'by force of logical necessity'. To take an example from Marx, consider the wage form in capitalist societies. It cannot be accounted for in the absence of a critique of capitalism as a system of class exploitation; and such an account can only be a 'politico-ethical critique' if, as Marx argues, the wage form is a mechanism of exploitation and alienation. Creaven (2007) again

... specifying the nature of 'what is' (capitalism as a system of class exploitation) logically entails a specification of 'what ought' (an alternative social system in which class exploitation is abolished). This is simply unavoidable, since capitalism is not a force of nature, is not governed by natural necessity, and so is not beyond rational criticism or the powers of human agency to ameliorate or abolish.

(p. 17)

It is morally and logically intrinsic to the sociological project, we argue later, to fuel social struggles against structured social forces and relations of exploitation and oppression that preserve the power and privilege of higher groups or classes at the expense of the life-chances of lower groups or classes. Moreover, to do so is to engage in 'ethico-political "right action"'.

In his later work Bhaskar built on his earlier discourses on the natural and social sciences and the notion of human emancipation:

the eudaimonistic society, the goal put forward by dialectical critical realism, depends on the transcendence of all master/slave-type relations. Here it is useful to distinguish between two concepts of power: power 1, which is transformative capacity, and power 2, which is oppression. Clearly what we need to do is for the oppressed to have more of power 1 in order to transform the power 2 relation between their oppressors and themselves and in order to transform the relationship itself ...

(Bhaskar, 2017: 91)

Bhaskar here holds out the ultimate prospect of the eudaimonistic society, or a society in which the master/slave relations (Marx's generic 'class struggle') that have characterised all post-primitive social formations are finally vanquished (Marx's 'communism'). For this to occur, the power 1 relations that represent effective agency have to be marshalled against the power 2 relations that produce and reproduce – in one guise or another – exploitative and oppressive master/slave relations. The notion of a revised class/command dynamic in financial capitalism introduced earlier defines exploitation after Marx as class-driven and intrinsic to capitalism and expressive of its contradictions; locates oppression as a function of the command relations of the state; and interprets oppression in terms of its facilitation and 'protection' of exploitation.

Building on this, Bhaskar's concept of dialectical universalised ability articulates an ethical dimension to his argument:

We can get the gist of this logic by looking at two kinds of ethical dialectics that it postulates. The first, the dialectic of desire or agency: this proceeds from an agent having a desire. Then what is argued is that this desire contains within it a meta-desire to abolish any constraints on that desire. The logic of universalised ability insists that an agent so committed must logically be committed to the abolition of all dialectically similar constraints.

(Bhaskar, 2017: 92)

Communal agency (power 1 relations) thus entails a recognition of the desires of others, and hence a solidarity with them. The dialectics of discourse, via a necessary or logical acknowledgement of 'the person and situation one is in solidarity with', entails a companion recognition of a solidarity commitment to work to eliminate constraints on desires emanating from oppression (power 2

relations). The light at the end of the tunnel is the absencing of, or imagining of a future without, all constraining ills, or of all impediments to human freedom and flourishing.

It is important to note that Bhaskar, like Marx before him, is neither indulging in wishful thinking nor espousing some kind of utopianism. Recent re-workings of Marx's concept of 'communism' testify to the potential it retains to focus minds and action on absence and the possibilities for human renewal via novel forms of being. Nor should the notion of desire be interpreted as a kind of 'anything goes' consumerism. What Bhaskar is offering by means of his basic and dialectical critical realist approach is a philosophical rationale, incorporating a combined logical and moral potency, for absencing constraining ills rooted in oppression and opening up space for solidarity and human flourishing via agentic social transformation rooted in power 1 relations. Bhaskar's development of Marx's underlying philosophy can be summarised as follows:

Identifying the sources of false consciousness brings with it the expectation that such false consciousness, and the structures/systems that create it, should be challenged.

There is a moral obligation on the part of sociology to fuel social struggles against the false consciousness perpetuated by structured social forces and relations of exploitation and oppression that preserve the power and privilege of higher groups or classes at the expense of the life-chances of lower groups or classes.

Bhaskar's society based on human emancipation, similar to Marx's communism, extends and integrates the causal power of agency by bringing in the 'dialectic of universalised ability' and solidarity with the desires of others.

Development of the concept of dialectics around absence provides the space in which alternative futures can be imagined through the absencing of oppression and exploitation.

In the final part of this article, we suggest the salience of this kind of thesis for a grounded, viable twenty-first-century sociological project.

Addressing social fractures and fracturing

Envisioning possible futures, especially in abstract philosophical terms, does not in itself invite any particular type of political engagement. Bhaskar's (1987) assertion that society is an 'ensemble of structures, practices and conventions which individuals reproduce and transform, but which would not exist unless they did so' (p. 129) is not a statement with which most Marxists, or indeed sociologists, would dissent. It does, however, provide the context from which transformative practices might emerge, and in which the philosophy outlined above becomes salient providing the philosophical support for that transformative practice. The route map for change suggested here has its origins in the growing salience of the contradictions of capitalism outlined earlier, together with the resultant indication of a crisis of legitimacy of the kind anticipated over 40 years ago by Habermas (1975). Our argument can be broken down as follows:

As Streeck (2016) has convincingly shown, the contradictions of financial capitalism – led we contend by a small, transnational or nomadic hard-core of capital monopolists – have become accentuated to the point of threatening the survival of capitalism itself (for a wide-ranging discussion of the future of capitalism, see Wallerstein et al., 2018).

Notwithstanding the remarkable and historically proven regenerative capacities of capitalism, there have been growing indications of a possible legitimisation crisis since the trauma of the global financial implosion of 2008–2009. If this occurs it is most likely to take the form of a 'rationality crisis', whereby the state fails too conspicuously to deliver economically to significant segments of the electorate. One manifestation of this is the growing crisis in the private rented sector and the impact that this has both on the most vulnerable but also, and perhaps with more potential political impact, on the young.

A rationality crisis is unlikely in the absence of: (a) a triggering event and (b) a resonating narrative projecting a 'better', plausible and appealing post-capitalist alternative formation. The triggering event might be political, like the poll tax protest, or a particular happening or event, like (another, black) death in police custody. As far as the narrative is concerned, this is likely to be more effective the more it eschews utopian 'blueprints' in favour of Giddens' (1990) 'utopian realism' or Bhaskar's concrete utopianism. Dorling (2014) has suggested that the housing crisis could act as the triggering event, with young people rising up to challenge the status quo, thus triggering a, potentially transformative, rationality crisis.

A variety of forms of extra-parliamentary activism, ranging from campaign-specific through rights-based to (new) social movements (Scambler and Kelleher, 2006), are likely to provide the resources to pick up on and develop the potential for change implicit in any triggering event, as well as fuelling narrative readiness.

An ultimate precondition for effective transformatory or emancipatory change, however, is almost certainly class-based solidarity action. While the basis for such action has anchorage in the 'deepening' objective class relations of financial capitalism, the salience of subjective class relations for identity-formation has diminished. This is in part due to the fact that identity politics has infused contemporary culture and (mis)informed people's sense of self and class positioning.

Notwithstanding a declining tendency for people to think of themselves and others in class terms, we contend that 'class consciousness' is latent rather than manifest, real but hidden, subsumed in culture. When asked, people still readily affirm that Britain is a class society. A contingent triggering event is required to re-create a class-for-itself.

A narrative-based strategy of permanent reform may offer the optimum strategy towards a readiness for transformatory change. It seems probable that the imminent threat of a rationality crisis will force state concessions and possibly a pause or even retreat from rabid assaults on welfare statism via privatisation and commodification. Permanent reform refers to a graduated sequence of reforms starting with those for which there exists most public consensus and support and building relentlessly on these to tackle more foundational but less evident reforms that incrementally require exposing false consciousness. This is where the housing crisis affecting so many young people may prove pivotal as they are a group with considerable and growing influence and are difficult to 'other' because of their heterogeneity and sheer numbers.

Where does this leave us in relation to 'classical' Marxian theory? The earlier assertion that the class/command dynamic is the prepotent social determinant of, or causal mechanism for, health inequalities in nation states like Britain offered an idea of what a basic and dialectical critical realist-informed neo-Marxian sociology of health inequalities might look like.

This can be illustrated through the reconceptualisation of a post-Goffman (1968) sociology of stigma to acknowledge the social structural anchorage of attributions of shame in the contradictions of capitalism (Scambler, 2009, 2018a, in press). Basic to this revised or extended sociology of stigma is a distinction between stigma, denoting an 'ontological deficit' and constituting an infringement against socio-cultural norms of shame, and deviance, denoting a 'moral deficit' and constituting an infringement against socio-cultural norms of blame. Stigma, in short, refers to an imperfection of being, or non-conformance; while deviance refers to personal culpability, or non-compliance. Moreover, both stigma and deviance can be either 'enacted or felt': that is, they can manifest as discrimination on the part of others, or as a sense of shame or blame and a fear of discrimination by others.

Table 1 presents different combinations of stigma and deviance. Three of the four resultant cells are accorded grim labels. The negative trio here 'perform' abnormality. Nobody wants to be cast and 'policed' as an abject, reject or loser (and each, incidentally can and often does impact negatively on health and longevity). Using this framing, a post-Goffman theory of the 'weaponising of stigma' can be laid out. In financial capitalism, charges of deviance (blame) have been appended to charges of

stigma (shame) and used as a politically calculated means to rationalise and legitimate action against disadvantaged and vulnerable people (most obviously in relation to harsh benefit cuts and the rolling out of ‘universal credit’ – witness the distinction between ‘strivers’ and ‘scivers’). One of us has highlighted the implications of these messages of blame and shame, when used to promote conceptualisations of disability and the ‘othering’ of disabled people (<https://www.cost-of-living.net/from-victims-to-heroes-to-scroungers-changes-in-the-public-perception-of-disabled-people/>).

Table 1. Stigma and/or deviance, shame and/or blame.

Stigma+ Deviance+	Stigma+ Deviance–
Abjects	Rejects
Stigma– Deviance–	Stigma– Deviance+
Normals	Losers

Source: Scambler (2018a, 2018b).

If related directly to financial capital as a way of illustrating a growing rationality crisis, then abjects is the label of preference for the class-driven governing oligarchy, since it most readily facilitates ‘unrestrained’ policies in the interests capital accumulation, with rejects and losers not far behind. As the American labelling theorists insisted in the 1950s, and as recent stigma theorists have affirmed (Jacquet, 2015; Link and Phelan, 2001; Parker and Aggleton, 2003), it takes power to effectively label or weaponise stigma (Scambler, 2018a); hence the un- or under-employed, those on benefits, single-parent families, people with disabilities, migrants, illegal or otherwise (e.g. the Windrush generation), and so on are more subject to class exploitation and state oppression than the bankers who precipitated the global financial crisis of 2008–2009 or the politicians who via deregulation cleared the path for them.

It is not possible, we argue, to advance a credible sociological explanation of phenomena like health inequalities or the weaponising of stigma in the class-interests of exploitation and oppression in the absence of a macro-frame derived from the work of Marx and his successors. Such phenomena are anchored in the power 2 relations of capitalism and its contradictions, in class struggle, and in state-sanctioned and sponsored capital accumulation. This brings us to consideration of the role of sociology and sociologists in supporting/seeking transformatory change.

Sociology: Bourgeois apologetics or agents for emancipation, transformation and flourishing?
If sociology is what sociologists do, then a case might be made that we have collectively traded the potential for change of the kind demanded by Marx and called for by Bhaskar to meet the requirements of an academy increasingly embedded in the financial capitalist system. Continued employment and progression necessitate some level of compliance with the university institution. This can be seen in the six types of sociology and sociologist (Scambler, 2018b; Scambler and Scambler, 2015) that we have previously outlined. These are set out in Table 2. Professional sociology comprises both the backbone and bread-and-butter of the discipline, giving rise to scholars committed to the accumulation of evidence-based knowledge of society and social change. Policy sociology is represented by reformers and a utilitarian logic of progressive change. Critical sociology affords a space for radicals to interrogate not only social phenomena but the sociological means available to address them; its discourse is meta-theoretical. Public sociology, for which Burawoy (2005) makes a special plea, yields democrats with a brief to take sociology into the public sphere to inform, challenge and educate; pace Habermas (1984, 1987) it follows the logic of communicative action. This quartet, with an amendment and extension or two, comprises Burawoy’s four types of sociology.

Table 2. Six sociologies and their representatives and discourses/logics.

Sociologies	Sociologists	Discourses/Logics
Professional	Scholar	Cumulative
Policy	Reformer	Utilitarian
Critical	Radical	Meta-theoretical
Public	Democrat	Communicative
Foresight	Visionary	Speculative
Action	Activist	Strategic

Source: Scambler (2018a, 2018b).

Our additions to Burawoy's four types are foresight and action sociology, and it is this duo that primarily concerns us here. While professional and policy – and more especially critical and public – sociology can lend themselves to societal explanation and social transformation, it is foresight and action sociology that are most relevant to a Marxian or neo-Marxian perspective. Foresight sociology can and in our view should be a primary resource for those seeking narratives of social betterment, of utopian realism and concrete utopianism. Its agenda is to envisage evidence-based alternative futures, ranging from discrete and local institutions to national services like state education or the NHS to post-neoliberal economics. 'Future studies' have pioneered this form of sociology, though their efforts have been restricted, notably around ecological issues rather than the economic parameters of societal formation (Urry, 2016). Most pertinent at present, however, are the accounts of non-sociologists like journalists Mason (2015) and Monbiot (2017), each of whom constructs a narrative of and for social transformation. Bhaskar's dialectics of absence provide the space within which foresight sociology can flourish.

Action sociology delivers activists committed to strategic action or engagement oriented to outcome. Admittedly, the espousal of action sociology, involving a significant shift from professional through to public and even foresight sociology, introduces a tension between discourses oriented to rational consensus and one oriented to results. But it is only action sociology, which stays engaged beyond mere entry to civil society and the public sphere, that carries the potential to advocate for – 'is-to-ought' – societal change towards justice and human flourishing.

However, there is a further qualification to make. One of us has suggested, albeit it in a blog (www.grahamscambler.com), that action sociology can deliver three subtypes of action sociologist: (a) the ideologist, (b) the bystander and (c) the subversive. The ideologist actively represents a systematically distorted view of the social world reflective of false consciousness and of specifiable vested interests, which may well be those of the capitalist executive and their co-optees and allies but can of course have other drivers. The bystander is likewise an entrant into civil society and the public sphere, but he or she does so by opting to study and champion issues or topics that allow for a side-stepping of power relations and constraining ills. Bystanders can be innocent or calculating, though it can be difficult to distinguish the two: workplaces can be investigated while absenting capitalism's contradictions. The subversive, by contrast, confronts ideology and the vested interests it rationalises and endeavours to legitimise head on. It is the subversive who most closely exemplifies the qualities and commitments adduced in the name of action sociology above. In terms of the ethos of social investigation epitomised by Marx and fortified by Bhaskar, the subversive is defined in opposition not only to ideology but also to the social organisation and institutions that provide its infrastructure and the cultural politics that lend it credibility and fuel it. In the context of our thesis in this article, it is the sociological activist as subversive who shows an elective affinity with the spirit of social emancipation and human flourishing. It is the sociological activist who is most explicitly fulfilling the moral obligation to fuel social struggles against false consciousness.

An insistence that the sociological project, which we envisage as a 'science of society' is extended to actively/subversively combat ideology whenever and wherever it is encountered, guarantees neither

successful outcomes nor – by permanent reform or any other means – the securing of a better society. The extent of the claim being made is that sociology can and should be allied to, and in tune with, Marx's aspirations as re-grounded and translated by Bhaskar. Sociology, in other words, can and should coalesce around emancipation and social transformation, ultimately expressed as human flourishing; or else what is it about, and what is it for? The sociological project is necessarily in the service of power 1 relations, logically and morally oriented to 'lifeworld rationalisation' (Scambler, 1996, 2018b) In the concluding paragraphs we return to action sociology, its relationship with other forms of the sociological project and the extent, and limits, of the symmetry between it and the Marxist, DCR-based framework we have proposed.

Action sociology revisited

While there is a real symmetry between the philosophies and theories of Marx and Bhaskar and a BCR- and DCR-based action sociology, a number of qualifications are in order. But first the symmetries. What is shared, first, is a commitment to realism, or an acceptance of the view that it is really existing (causal) mechanisms that deliver the events we experience. Second, there is a common goal, namely, to aid (socially structured but not structurally determined) power 1 relations in absencing constraining ills by exposing and 'subversively' opposing institutionalised false consciousness and the artifices of ideology that afford it rationalising and legitimising cover. All, in other words, are about collective and individual emancipation via social transformation towards individual and, necessarily, universal human flourishing.

Third, each answers to a strategic logic, discourse or mode of engagement. This is most apparent in Marx of course, though it applies – if less eloquently – to Bhaskar and action sociology. For sociologists as a community to stick with professional, policy, critical, public and foresight sociologies, even with bystanding action sociology, is to settle with a status quo condemning generations of those disadvantaged by class position, and much else besides, to crumbs from the table. This attests to the moral obligation on the part of sociology to fuel social struggles against oppression and the fractured society that financial capitalism has spawned.

This last point tills the ground for the first of a number of qualifications. Our argument is that sociology as a whole should – indeed, logically and morally must – cover the six sociologies, not that each sociologist should cover all six. We support and respect advocates and practitioners in professional, policy and critical sociology, agree with Burawoy on the significance of the underdevelopment of public sociology, and push here for added investment in foresight sociology. Subversive action sociology, as defined here, is in a kinship relation to Marxian and critical realist thought, theory and praxis.

An important second qualification to this symmetry is that there exists a distinctive tension between action and its five companion sociologies. It is a tension epitomised in professional and public 'versus' action sociology. Professional sociology conforms to a cumulative logic, public sociology to a communicative logic; action sociology, however, is essentially strategic. To adopt Bourdieu's (1980) terminology it might reasonably be said that action sociologists are entrants to a 'field' which is alien to the academic 'habitus' and that they do so with limited and limiting 'capital'. They are then compelled to 'compete' against the odds in the protest sector of civil society and the public sphere in a field where political capital (of which they have little or none) generally holds sway. In such a context, it is only too easy for action sociologists, many already subject to the tightening ligature of neoliberal, metric university 'reform', to be compromised and to compromise their way through bystander to ideological action sociology. Furthermore, a latent function of any ideological discrediting of a subversive action sociology could well be an institutional setback for the discipline as a whole (undermining the well-funded respectability sought by the likes of the Academy of Social Sciences).

A third, and final, qualification serves to set action sociology apart from Marx and Bhaskar. Professional sociology is at the very core of what sociology is and what sociologists do: it is the parent to the other five. If it delivers compelling realist explanatory accounts of mechanisms that sit fundamentally at odds with neo-Marxism or, less likely, with BCR and/or DCR, then so be it: its subversive commitment must shift its focus. In our view, this has yet to happen.

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